MONTANA NSF EPSCoR
SMART FIRES

Email: info@mtnsfepscor.org
Website: https://smartfires.mtnsfepscor.org

2026–27 SMART FIRES Tribal Colleges Seed Award

Request for Proposals

Deadline: November 6, 2026

Background

The Sensors, Machine Learning, and Artificial Intelligence in Real Time Fire Science (SMART FIRES) NSF EPSCoR RII Track-1 project develops and deploys new technologies to better understand prescribed fire behavior and its impacts on Montanans, particularly in rural and tribal communities. The statewide team spans Montana State University, University of Montana, Montana Technological University, Salish Kootenai College, Little Big Horn College, and Flathead Valley Community College, working across four thematic teams — Fire and Smoke Science (FSS), Smart Optical Sensors (SOS), Social Psychology, Economics, and Ethics (SPEE), and Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning (AIML) — plus programs in cyberinfrastructure, STEM education, workforce development, outreach, and broadening participation.

Objectives

SMART FIRES' Seed Award program funds research, capacity building, and STEM education at Montana's Tribal Colleges. Awards can cover personnel costs (faculty, instructors, students), research supplies, field data collection and analysis, and travel. The program aims to (1) connect Tribal Colleges to the NSF EPSCoR network, and (2) create opportunities for Tribal Colleges to conduct research, build science capacity, or strengthen STEM education important to their school, students, and communities.

Projects do not need to align directly with the SMART FIRES research topics above — support is open to any STEM-related work, though connections to SMART FIRES research and researchers are encouraged.

Award information

Maximum Funding Per Award: Up to $20,000, which must include any allowable indirect costs (F&A).
Estimated Number of Awards: We anticipate funding 2-3 projects, depending upon available funding and the number of proposal submissions.
Award Period: January 1, 2027 to August 31, 2027

Key dates

Application deadline	Friday, November 6, 2026
Award notification	Friday, November 20, 2026
Funds must be fully spent by	August 31, 2027

Eligibility

Any faculty, staff, or instructor at a Montana Tribal College may apply. Partnering with an existing SMART FIRES research team is encouraged but not required. All supported investigators and students must be from Montana institutions.

The SMART FIRES Seed Award Program is supported by NSF Award No. 2242802

MONTANA NSF EPSCoR
SMART FIRES

Email: info@mtnsfepscor.org

Website: https://smartfires.mtnsfepscor.org

How to apply

Email a proposal as a PDF to Dr. Aaron Thomas (aaron.thomas@mso.umt.edu) by Friday, November 6, 2026. Submit the budget separately as an Excel file using the budget template. Your proposal must include:

Cover Page (1 page)

- Proposal title
- Lead investigator, co-investigator(s), affiliation, and contact information
- Summary for a general audience (250 words max)

Project Description (2-3 pages recommended)

- Objectives: summary of the proposed work; note alignment with SMART FIRES priorities if applicable (not required)
- Work plan: activities, timeline, and purpose of any specialized supplies or materials requested
- Outcomes and benefits: anticipated knowledge created, publications or proposals, undergraduate research opportunities (number and type), and students impacted

Additional Required Information (not counted toward the 3-page limit)

- Budget and 1-page justification, using the budget template. Eligible costs: salaries and wages, supplies, contracted services, travel, and tuition (fees not allowable). Include fringe benefits on all personnel salary and institutional F&A at your institution's approved rate — F&A cannot be waived.
- CV or resume for all investigators (not required for students)
- References cited (if applicable)

Reporting requirements

Grantees must provide project updates and supported-participant information to the Montana NSF EPSCoR State Office when requested, and submit a final report within 2 months of the award end date. The report should cover activities, supplies purchased, publications, new courses developed, and any extramural grant applications or awards resulting from support — including names, degrees, and demographic information for supported students. All supported participants must also complete the About You section of the NSF EDOCS reporting system.

Proposal review

Proposals are reviewed by Dr. Aaron Thomas (UM IRSE) and the Montana NSF EPSCoR office for: alignment with STEM goals, relevance to SMART FIRES project goals (if applicable), budget justification, and potential to expand student access to research or STEM experiences — especially for undergraduates, women, and underrepresented minority students.

Proposal submission

Submit the proposal as a PDF and the budget as an Excel file by email to Dr. Aaron Thomas (aaron.thomas@mso.umt.edu) by **5:00 pm MDT, November 6, 2026**. Proposers are encouraged to contact Dr. Thomas (406-243-2052) to discuss deadlines, the award period, and to ask questions or for assistance in putting together the proposal and package.

The SMART FIRES Seed Award Program is supported by NSF Award No. 2242802